**Adult Learners**

Characteristics

Below is a comparison of the learning characteristics of adult learners and youth learners. Of course, these are generalizations with exceptions occurring in each group of learners, but you may want to keep these differences in mind as you consider the learner population you expect in your training sessions. The design of your trainings would be influenced by your expected participant population.

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| Adult Learners | Youth Learners |
| Problem-centered; seek educational solutions to where they are compared to where they want to be in life | Subject-oriented; seek to successfully complete each course, regardless of how course relates to their own goals |
| Results-oriented; have specific results in mind for education - will drop out if education does not lead to those results because their participation is usually voluntary | Future-oriented; youth education is often a mandatory or an expected activity in a youth's life and designed for the youth's future |
| Self-directed; typically not dependent on others for direction | Often depend on adults for direction |
| Often skeptical about new information; prefer to try it out before accepting it | Likely to accept new information without trying it out or seriously questioning it |
| Seek education that relates or applies directly to their perceived needs, that is timely and appropriate for their current lives | Seek education that prepares them for an often unclear future; accept postponed application of what is being learned |
| Accept responsibility for their own learning if learning is perceived as timely and appropriate | Depend on others to design their learning; reluctant to accept responsibility for their own learning |

In summary, adult learners usually approach learning differently than younger learners:

* they are more self-guided in their learning
* they bring more, and expect to bring more, to a learning situation because of their wider experience - and can take more away
* they require learning "to make sense" - they will not perform a learning activity just because the instructor said to do it

Teaching Strategies for Adult Learners

This means that you may find certain teaching strategies more effective than others with your adult learners.

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| Adult Learner Characteristics | Teaching Strategies |
| Adults have years of experience and a wealth of knowledge | Use your adult learners as resources for yourself and for other learners; use open-ended questions to draw out learners’ knowledge and experiences; provide many opportunities for dialogue among learners |
| Adults have established values, beliefs, and opinions | Take time to clarify learner expectations of the course; permit debate and the challenge of ideas; be careful to protect minority opinions within the class |
| Adults expect to be treated as adults | Treat questions and comments with respect; acknowledge contributions learners make to the class; do not expect learners to necessarily agree with your plan for the course |
| Adults need to feel self-directed | Engage learners in designing the learning process; expect learners to want more than one medium for learning and to want control over the learning pace and start/stop times |
| Adults often have a problem centered approach to learning | Show immediately how new knowledge or skills can be applied to current problems or situations; use participatory techniques such as case studies and problem-solving groups |
| Adults tend to be less interested in survey types of courses and more interested in straightforward how-to | Focus on theories and concepts within the context of their applications to relevant problems; orient the course content toward direct applications rather than toward theory |
| Adults have increased variation in learning styles (individual differences among people increase with age) | Use a variety of teaching materials and methods to take into account differences in style, time, types, and pace of learning |

Adapted from Adult Learners, Rochester Institute of Technology, <http://online.rit.edu/faculty/teaching_strategies/adult_learners.cfm>, 6/6/2010.